

**California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System**  
**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**California Interagency Wildlife Task Group**

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RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER

*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

Family: PICIDAE  
B298

Order: PICIFORMES

Class: AVES

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Occurrence in California largely transmontane. A summer resident on the Modoc Plateau, where it is common in the Warner Mts., and in the White Mts. to the south (Devilleers 1970). Frequents mixed conifer, aspen, and montane riparian habitats, especially areas with aspen, willow, and cottonwood. Winters to the south, particularly along the lower Colorado River, in the Mojave and Colorado deserts, and into the coastal regions south of about 35° latitude (Devilleers 1970). On the winter range, frequents desert riparian, orchard-vinyard, and urban habitats, and other riparian areas.

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Omnivorous; diet includes tree sap, ants, beetles, wasps, caterpillars, spiders, small amounts of fruits (especially dogwood, creepers, blackberries), and cambium. Drills holes in trunk of a variety of deciduous trees, and some conifers, and eats sap, cambium and other soft tissues, and insects trapped in sap (Bent 1939). Also hawks insects.

Cover: Nests and roosts in a tree cavity for cover.

Reproduction: Excavates cavity in snag or live tree with dead wood. Uses aspen, ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, lodgepole pine, white and red fir, birch, elm, cottonwood, alder, willow, and others. Apparently prefers to nest in aspen and montane riparian habitats. Minimum dbh required for a nest tree was estimated to be approximately 25 cm (10 in) by Thomas (1979).

Water: No data found, but frequents riparian habitats.

Pattern: Frequents aspen; also edges in mature mixed conifer, and montane riparian habitats, especially with aspen. Requires snags and trees with dead wood for excavating cavities.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Migrates from Modoc Plateau; commonly winters along the lower Colorado River and in desert areas of southern California.

Home Range: Lawrence (1967) suggested that home range and territory probably are the same in this group of sapsuckers.

Territory: In northern California, Howell (1952) found 14 nests in an area of 2.4 x 0.8 km (1.5 x 0.5 mi). Nests were 91-457 m (300-1500 ft) apart, and rough sketch maps suggested

territory size of 0.6 to 6 ha (1.6 to 15 ac). Guards sap wells from hummingbirds, warblers, chipmunks, and other species (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

**Reproduction:** Breeds from early May into August, with peak activity in June. One clutch per yr of 3-7 eggs, typically 4-5 (Harrison 1978). Incubation 12-14 days. Howell (1952) reported broods that remained in nest about 25 days. Both parents incubate and brood altricial young.

**Niche:** Occasionally considered a nuisance because of drilling tree trunks in orchards (Bent 1939). Trees usually not damaged, and feeding on arthropods is beneficial. This primary cavity-nester performs important ecological function of excavating nest and roost cavities used in turn by secondary cavity-nesters, which cannot excavate their own (Raphael and White 1984).

**Comments:** Formerly classified as a race of *S. varius*, the yellow-bellied sapsucker (e.g., Grinnell and Miller 1944).

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